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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: KHOTAN OFFICIALS HIGHLIGHTS IMPROVED SECURITY  
CONDITIONS DESPITE CONTINUED FOREIGN INFILTRATION  
ATTEMPTS, LOCALS NOTE CONTINUED UIGHUR- HAN MISTRUST

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- [1](#)B. FBIS 20050831000133
- [1](#)C. BEIJING 8788
- [1](#)D. FBIS 20050831000214
- [1](#)E. 05 BEIJING 9604
- [1](#)F. BEIJING 11606
- [1](#)G. STATE 74399

Classified By: Classified by Acting Political Section Deputy Kin Moy.  
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

#### Summary -----

[1](#)1. (C) The vast improvement in the security situation in southwest Xinjiang's Khotan Prefecture is due to both heightened government counterterrorism activities and the public's strong support in combating the "Three Forces" of terrorism, separatism and extremism, Khotan officials told poloffs during a late May visit to the prefecture. Small groups of "troublemakers" and foreign-based terrorist organizations, such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Hizb ut-Tahrir, however, have continued to plot violent attacks, which have mostly been prevented by the authorities with help from locals, they maintained. While Khotan officials stated that the government closed several unauthorized religious schools, some which were advocating terrorism, local Uighurs reported the continued detention of a large number of underage Islamic students and their teachers. Uighurs throughout Xinjiang highlighted the extreme difficulty of obtaining passports without first bribing the authorities. Reports from both the government and the general public indicate that violent conflict has practically disappeared from Khotan over the past few years, but relations between the Uighurs and the Han Chinese community in Khotan City remain cool. Unemployment appears high among both local and migrant Uighurs, who perceive the growing number of Han Chinese as enjoying much greater economic opportunities. End Summary.

#### Officials Note Major Improvement in Khotan's Security -----

[1](#)2. (C) The security situation in southwest Xinjiang's Khotan Prefecture has improved greatly from the 1990s, when the area was shaken by numerous terrorist

incidents (Ref A), Khotan Public Security Bureau (PSB) Office Director Zhang Xiuchen and Deputy Director Dilimilachi stressed to poloffs during a late May visit to Khotan. The Central Government's investment in the region and efforts to spread legal knowledge and civic responsibility have contributed significantly to the vastly more secure atmosphere in Khotan, Zhang asserted, remarking that Khotan is now the "safest" place in Xinjiang. Unlike during the 1990s, people are no longer afraid to walk down the street. Homicide cases so far this year have totaled only seven or eight, only one or two of which were premeditated murders. Criminal and public security cases dropped 20 percent this year and mostly involved theft and robbery, Zhang reported, while stating that high unemployment was a major factor contributing to these crimes.

#### Foreign Forces Main Source of Local Disturbances

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13. (C) Dilimilachi remarked, nonetheless, that there are still some small-scale "sudden" violent incidents and attempts by foreign-based terrorist organizations to infiltrate Khotan. Weapons are occasionally found in private homes, while much less frequently than during the last decade. A small number of "troublemakers" persist in their attempts to provoke others, Dilimilachi asserted. For example, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) has continued to plan bombings and other attacks, but the authorities have prevented these plots. The (Germany-based) East Turkestan Information Center has tried to stir up unrest within the local community through its Internet

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activities, Dilimilachi claimed.

#### Hizb ut-Tahrir Active in Region

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14. (C) Asked about recent reports that Hizb ut-Tahrir members were arrested in Khotan (Refs B,C), Zhang stated that Hizb ut-Tahrir recently sent "threatening" letters to local officials. While Hizb ut-Tahrir, which maintains a large presence in Uzbekistan, focuses primarily on distributing propaganda, it has also stockpiled weapons and planned bombings in Xinjiang, he asserted, speculating that the group will continue its attempts to spark violence in the region. In separate meetings, religious affairs officials asserted that Hizb ut-Tahrir is a terrorist organization, not a religious group. Khotan Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission Deputy Director Metnaz Moussa emphasized that neither the Khotan Government nor people accept Hizb ut-Tahrir as a religious entity.

#### Local Community Key in Fighting the "Three Forces"

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15. (C) Khotan public security officials noted the successes of international counterterrorism cooperation and the government's counterterrorism campaigns. Moreover, they highlighted the general public's role in improving the security situation and resisting the "Three Forces" (terrorism, separatism and extremism). Reports and clues offered by the local community have helped considerably in uncovering terrorist plots, according to Zhang, remarking that the government's improvement of the "110" emergency hotline has facilitated more effective reporting of such cases.

16. (C) Khotan Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission Party Secretary He Chengang explained that the

government, generally speaking through the local Islamic Association, has stressed to religious leaders not to permit "interference" from outside groups. The numerous terrorist incidents in the past hurt locals and their economy, so religious leaders are aware that they must resolutely oppose terrorist and extremist infiltration. In the past, certain "illegal" Islamic schools preached jihad and trained the students to be terrorists.

#### Education Used to Stop Non-Violent Illegal Activities

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17. (C) Most of the recent incidents related to the "Three Forces" have involved "illegal publicity," the distribution or propagation of illegal information, Zhang reported. The police generally handle such cases by "educating" the perpetrators if the cases do not involve violence. Similarly, the government uses "education" to handle most incidents of illegal "underground" religious activities, which are dealt with as civil disputes, unless they involve national security. He recalled several cases of illegal religious training of minors less than 18 years of age. In such instances, the authorities ordered an end to the activities and encouraged the minors to participate in regular mosque activities once they turned 18. Zhang asserted that there have been cases where youth have been forced to study the Koran. Unauthorized religious schools have also used religious education as a pretext to disseminate information harmful to national security.

18. (C) Officials throughout Xinjiang are trying to strictly control the circulation of religious materials. Deputy Director of the regional (provincial) Xinjiang Religious and Ethnic Affairs Commission Islamic Affairs Division Ma Jin cited a regulation that forbids Xinjiang residents from bringing in religious materials from foreign countries. Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission Deputy Director Lei Xianliang, when asked about a report that

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Uighurs in the prefecture capital Korla were arrested after they were discovered carrying religious books (Ref D), stated that the government will not permit "misleading" materials to damage people's religious beliefs and activities. Nonetheless, a Uighur merchant selling Islamic books in Urumqi's Erdaoqiao neighborhood showed poloffs a number of Korans in his book cart that he said originated in Saudi Arabia and Syria.

#### Locals Note Crackdown on Underground Religious Study

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19. (C) A number of Khotan residents in separate conversations with poloff echoed the government's assertions that the security situation in Khotan is generally stable, contrasting it with the more chaotic years of the 1990s. Mentohte, a Uighur man in his mid-20s, asserted, nonetheless, that local police have detained around 3,000-4,000 participants in unofficial religious activities in each of the past few years. Authorities have apprehended many underage Islamic students and those who have been found teaching the Koran to minors, he explained. Ayli Yasma, a retired soldier and former Khotan Guesthouse guard, told poloff that these underground religious schools have ceased to function in the city but still exist in the countryside.

#### Ethnic Relations in Khotan Stable but Frigid

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¶10. (C) Poloffs did not detect as strong a police presence in Khotan as in Kashgar (Ref E), but local Uighurs did indicate that undercover police still patrol the city and that sensitive political discussions on the street should be avoided. While there have been no large conflicts pitting Uighurs against Han in recent years, as occurred in the past, mistrust and dislike are still the main features of Uighur-Han relations in Khotan, where 97 percent of the prefecture's 420,000 residents and approximately 80-90 percent of the urban Khotan population is Uighur. Outside the workplace there is very little interaction between the two ethnic groups, Ayli and other interlocutors maintained.

¶11. (C) Many local Uighurs harbor muted resentment against the Han, who are seen not only as increasingly encroaching on employment opportunities but also are associated closely with the Chinese Government, which has placed seemingly unfair restrictions on Uighurs' activities. The Han continue to "put pressure on" the Uighurs, the same form of treatment that led to Uighur unrest in the 1990s, Ayli asserted, highlighting that his child cannot attend mosque prayers. The restrictions are not limited to the religious arena. Satellite television was banned around seven or eight years ago, he noted. Locals even seem dissatisfied with the official Chinese version of Uighur history. A Uighur Foreign Affairs Office employee-turned curator at the recently renovated Khotan Museum, when poloff asked if the 8th century was indeed the period when Uighurs settled in Xinjiang, quietly suggested that the actual date was much earlier. This is hard to prove, however, because many historical records were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, she stated.

#### Passports for Uighurs Hard to Come By -----

¶12. (C) One major grievance cited widely by Uighur interlocutors, not only in Khotan but throughout Xinjiang, is the extreme difficulty they face in obtaining passports. Many Uighurs wish to study or work abroad, but it is virtually impossible for Uighurs under 40 years-of-age to get their passport applications approved. One 30 year-old Uighur man, while showing poloff the PSB's stamp of approval on his passport application, remarked that the only way for middle-aged Uighurs to obtain passports is to offer large bribes. This individual, as well as a few

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other Khotan Uighurs, said they applied for a passport primarily to travel to Saudi Arabia and perform the Hajj. The government-organized trip is too expensive, the prospective Hajji asserted. Khotan Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission officials noted that 5,000 Xinjiang residents, including 500 from Khotan, made the pilgrimage on their own this past year. This is in comparison to the 256 locals out of a total 2,000 Xinjiang Muslims who participated in the government-arranged trip.

#### Uighurs Highlight Economic Competition with Han -----

¶13. (C) Approximately 10,000 new Han migrants are arriving each year in Khotan, a city of around 400,000 residents, according to a young Uighur who said he had not found a full-time job even two years after graduation from an Urumqi college. Whether or not these figures are completely accurate, as they differ somewhat from the official statistics, they demonstrate the perception that the percentage of Han

residents is rising rapidly. Unemployment in Khotan appears widespread. Several clusters of young Uighur men standing casually on the sidewalks during the middle of the workday told poloffs they lacked full-time jobs, despite the fact that some of them had attained high-school and even college-level degrees. The Han have higher salaries and better quality housing than Uighur residents, according to Tarim, a 20-plus year-old native of nearby Yutian (Keriya) County. There is a clear influx of Uighur migrants from surrounding towns and villages looking for labor jobs in Khotan City.

¶14. (C) More than half of the Han Chinese living in Khotan City moved from other parts of China, and these migrants have stimulated the economy and created new opportunities for locals, Khotan Foreign Affairs Office Party Secretary Che Yusheng asserted. Che and Prefecture Vice-Commissioner Lu Ping represent a select group of fluent Uighur-speaking Han civil servants whose parents settled in Khotan after helping "liberate" Xinjiang in 1949. But unlike Lu, Che and a limited number of other Han who were born and raised in the area, most of the recent Han arrivals lack an understanding of Uighur traditions and language, contributing to a distinct separation between the two communities. One Han shopkeeper who arrived in Xinjiang from Eastern China ten years ago said that while most Uighurs treat her kindly, she has faced "discrimination." Han produce sellers noted that they have difficulty communicating with Uighurs and interaction is limited to simple business transactions.

Comment

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¶15. (C) Khotan authorities appear confident that their strategy of combining counterterrorism, economic investment and civic education, together with strict religious controls and a program to provide de facto political training to all Muslim leaders (Ref F), will effectively maintain local stability and prevent a resurgence of unrest. Although the government boasts its recent successes, there are questions about whether it can sustain the current stability indefinitely in this, by all accounts, previously volatile area. It is also interesting that what the government attributed to terrorist activities in the 1990s is still characterized by some local Uighurs as opposition to Chinese Government "pressure." The real test for the government is whether it can address the economic needs of the local population while controlling the religious and civil affairs of Uighurs without creating a breeding ground for anti-government activism.

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